

Fair Exchange: Education and Service Procuring America's Officer Corps

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ABSTRACT

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1996 (P.L. 104-106, s531) asked that the Department of Defense report to the Committee on the relationship between active duty obligations for Service academy graduates and the number or quality of applicants seeking appointment to the academies. This paper provides information from the Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS.) and from the Services suggesting that a change in the length of obligation after graduation would have little effect on interest in attending the Service academies. The paper also presents YATS data indicating that differing monetary incentives would affect interest in ROTC participation. Finally, it describes reasons youth give for interest in serving as a military officer -- and disincentives for the same.

Introduction

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1990, s511, established that the active duty service obligation for Service academy graduates would change from five to six years, beginning with the classes of 1996; however, the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1996, s531 repealed that longer obligation. This paper summarizes a report to the Committee on the impact on youth attitudes, the relationship between active duty obligations for Service academy graduates, and the number or quality of applicants seeking appointment.

Since 1975, the Department of Defense annually has conducted the Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS), a computer-assisted telephone interview of a nationally representative sample of 10,000 young men and women. This survey provides information on the propensity, attitudes, and motivations of young people toward military service.

In 1995, selected YATS respondents were asked about their interest in college officer-training programs. This paper describes their responses. The analysis focuses on respondents who indicated that they would like to complete at least four years of college (a Bachelor's degree), and had not yet completed more than two years of college. High school dropouts – non-students who had not completed high school -- were also excluded from the analysis.

Table 1 shows the number of respondents included in this analysis, by gender, race/ethnicity, and education status. In 1995, YATS over sampled areas in which the population was more than 30 percent Black. However, the data are weighted to accurately represent the national population, and the percentages shown in Table 1, and other tables in this paper, are weighted population estimates. With respect to

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race/ethnicity, the population examined here roughly matches the national youth population – about two-thirds white, one-sixth black, and one-sixth Hispanic. The unweighted counts by race/ethnicity and education status do not sum to the totals shown because of missing data.

Table 1

Number of Respondents Included in the Analysis and Estimated Population Percentages by Gender, Race/Ethnicity and Education

	Men		Women	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Race/Ethnicity				
White non-Hispanic	1919	66	1110	65
Black non-Hispanic	406	15	330	18
Hispanic	319	14	182	14
Educational				
High school nonsenior	813	25	446	22
High school senior	621	23	362	20
College student	753	24	470	25
Other postsecondary student	220	8	157	9
High school grad, no college	304	14	189	15
High school grad, some college	184	7	116	8
Total	2902	100	1744	100

Interest in Service Academies

YATS respondents were asked:

The U. S. Service Academies provide a very challenging military environment which includes a college education, physical fitness program, and hands-on leadership development. After this intense 4-year training program, students earn a B.S. degree and are commissioned as officers into one of the Armed Services. In return for their free education, officers are obligated to serve on active duty for several years.

Would you be interested in attending the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado, or the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in Connecticut?

* Persons who are neither White, Black, nor Hispanic, such as Pacific Islanders, Asians, or American Indians, are not counted as White, Black, or Hispanic, but are included in totals that are not broken out by race/ethnicity.

Those who indicated an interest in the academies were asked in which academies they were interested. As shown in Table 2, 40 percent of the men and 33 percent of the women indicated an interest in the academies. The percentages shown for each of the academies add to more than the percent interested, because some respondents mentioned more than one academy.

Table 2
Youth Interest in Service Academies
(percent indicating interest)

	Men	Women
Interested in an academy	40	33
West Point	18	13
Naval Academy	12	9
Air Force Academy	18	15
Coast Guard Academy	9	9

Those who said they were interested in the academies were asked:

Entrance requirements are competitive, like other major colleges and universities, and are based on academics, athletics, and extra-curricular activities. If you applied to *[the academies mentioned by the respondent]*, do you think you would be accepted? Would you say definitely, probably, probably not, or definitely not?

As shown in Table 3, 27 percent of both the men and the women said they would either "definitely" or "probably" be accepted. Finally, all who said they were interested in the academies were asked:

With a service obligation of [five/six] years, which of the following best describes your preference to attend. Would you say you would definitely, probably, probably not, or definitely not attend if accepted?

Half the respondents, selected at random, were asked if they would attend with a five year obligation; the other half, six years. Results suggest that the difference between a 5-year and a 6-year obligation would not materially affect youth interest in attending the Service academies. The differences are not statistically significant.

Respondents saying that they would not be interested in attending one of the academies were asked why they were not interested. They answered in their own words, and answers were tabulated by the interviewers, as shown in Table 4. The small percentage of respondents mentioning the post-graduation obligation is consistent with the indifference to a five- vs. six-year obligation among those who were interested in the academies.

Table 3

Perceived Likelihood of Acceptance and Attendance at Service Academies
 (percent of those interested)

	Men				Women			
	Def'ntly	Prob'ly	Prob'ly Not	Def'ntly Not	Def'ntly	Prob'ly	Prob'ly Not	Def'ntly Not
Be accepted?	11	57	26	5	6	61	24	7
Go w/ 5 year obligation	20	55	20	4	9	54	29	6
Go w/ 6 year obligation	18	53	24	4	11	55	25	7

Table 4

Reasons for Disinterest in Service Academies
 (percent of those not interested)

	Men	Women
Already have college plans	30	26
Military environment	28	33
Service obligation after graduation	6	5
Physical challenge	2	4
Academic challenge	2	2
Not qualified	2	2

With regard to the active duty service obligation, each of the Military Departments reports its views: The Army reports that the U.S. Military Academy has not observed significant adverse consequences in its recruiting program as a result of the longer service obligations, also pointing out that the quality of applicants remains essentially unchanged with the introduction of longer commitments. The YATS bears this out, concluding that the difference between a five- and six-year obligation appears to have little effect on self-reported likelihood of pursuing attendance at one of the Service academies.

By contrast, the Navy reports that the "six year service obligation was noted as being the reason 23 percent of the personnel declined appointment to (the US. Naval Academy)." Likewise, the Air Force reported problems with longer obligations. A three-year survey of those applicants who had been accepted for appointment, but declined, revealed that in more than 20 percent of the cases, the longer obligation influenced the decision to reject the Service academy appointment. However, the Air Force Academy reported, as did West Point, that the quality of entering classes was substantially unchanged as a result of the previously-pending increase in the service obligations from five to six years.

Interest in ROTC

Regardless of the interest they expressed in attending the Service academies, respondents were asked about their interest in Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs:

The Reserve Officer Training Corps, or ROTC, is a military program located on some college campuses. In addition to regular college courses, ROTC students receive instruction in military subjects such as leadership and military history. Some students receive ROTC scholarships. After graduation, students are obligated to serve as officers on active duty in the military for several years. Would you be interested in participating in a college ROTC program?

Twenty-three percent of the men, and 19 percent of the women said they were interested in ROTC. Those who were interested were asked:

Some ROTC students receive scholarships which are based on academic, athletic, and citizenship accomplishments. If you applied for an ROTC scholarship, do you think you would get one? Would you say definitely, probably, probably not, or definitely not?

As Table 5 shows, a very large majority of both the men and the women who were interested in ROTC said they would either "definitely" or "probably" receive a scholarship.

Two additional pairs of questions were asked to assess the effect of monthly pay and scholarships. First, all who said they were interested in ROTC, regardless of whether they said they had received a scholarship, were asked:

If you did not receive a scholarship, but were offered [\$150/\$300] each month to participate in ROTC, would you do so? Would you say you would definitely, probably, probably not, or definitely not participate in ROTC?

Half the respondents, randomly selected, were offered \$150 per month; the other half, \$300 per month. In addition, each respondent interested in ROTC was asked one of two questions:

If you were offered an ROTC scholarship that paid full tuition in addition to monthly pay, and were required four years of military service after graduation, would you accept?

Or

If you were offered an ROTC program that provided \$2,000 each year in addition to monthly pay, and were required four years of military service after graduation, would you accept?

The amount of the monthly payment appears to have a small effect on interest in ROTC, although the difference is not statistically significant. Men appear to be very positively influenced by the promise of full tuition as opposed to a flat \$2,000 per year.

The preference for full tuition vs. \$2,000 per year is not statistically significant among women.

Table 5

**Perceived Likelihood of Receiving an ROTC Scholarship
and of Participating in ROTC Given Various Incentives***
(percent of those interested)

	Men				Women			
	Def'ntly	Prob'ly	Prob'ly Not	Def'ntly Not	Def'ntly	Prob'ly	Prob'ly Not	Def'ntly Not
Receive scholarship?	11	66	19	2	8	71	18	2
Only \$150/month	16	58	23	3	24	52	17	5
Only \$300/month	24	54	19	3	28	58	10	2
Plus full tuition?	39	49	8	3	30	59	8	3
Plus \$2000?	20	52	23	4	24	57	15	2

*These percentages are of the whole population, not just those who said they were interested in the academies.

Reasons for Being a Military Officer

Finally, all respondents who said they were interested in either the Service academies or ROTC were asked why they would want to be a military officer. Results shown in Table 6 show strong interests in career opportunities, leadership development, education, and pay. Prestige and collateral benefits are less frequently cited. Only a small percentage of this population mentioned the flight program.

Table 6
Reasons Given for Wanting to Be an Officer
(percent)

	Men	Women
Career Opportunity	24	20
Leadership development	21	16
Education	19	22
Pay	18	21
Prestige	11	9
Benefits	10	10
Flight program	2	1
Other	38	39

Summary & Discussion

About 40 percent of young men and 33 percent of young women who plan to go to college, or are in the first two years of college, are interested in attending one of the Service academies. The majority expect that they would be accepted despite high entrance requirements. Only 5 to 6 percent mention Service obligation as a reason not to

attend one of the academies, and the difference between a 5-year and 6-year obligation appears to have little, if any, effect on self-reported likelihood of attending an academy.

ROTC is less appealing than the Service academies, although 23 percent of young men and 19 percent of young women expressed interest in ROTC. A monthly payment of \$300 per month appears to have somewhat more appeal than \$150 a month, though the difference is not statistically significant. The offer of full tuition* is more appealing than of \$2,000 per year, and results suggest the offer of full tuition would substantially increase ROTC participation.

In 1994-1995, the average tuition at a 4-year public institution of higher education for in-state students was \$2,689; the average at a private institution was \$11,522.-- Table 307, *Digest of Educational Statistics, 1995*, National Center for Educational Statistics (NCLES 95-029).

 [Back to Table of Contents](#)

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